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ABSTRACT

This book examines the role of Protestantism in America's colleges and universities, tracing the history of the influence of religion on these institutions from preeminence to obscurity, from the founding of Harvard in the 1630s through the collapse of the traditional establishment in the 1960s. Ranging from stories of many of our pace-setting universities at defining moments in their histories to an analysis of issues such as the debate over Darwinism and the impact of changing student mores, the book argues that just as the academy has made room for feminist and multicultural perspectives, so should there be room for traditional religious viewpoints. The establishment of Protestant Nonsectarianism, the defining of the American University in a scientific age, and the complications of religious influence are considered. The course of Protestant influence is illustrated by three vignettes of conflicts regarding religion at Yale, first with William Graham Sumner's teaching of scientific naturalism against the school's religious principles, to the height of Christian influence before the turn of the century, to William F. Buckley's criticism that the school was not religious enough. Conflicts between Catholic and Protestant institutions are also discussed. A postscript presents the author's views supporting inclusion of traditional religious viewpoints, pluralism, academic freedom, and church and state. (Individual chapters contain reference notes.) (JPB)

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